

A Life I Dared Only to Dream by ThatHCWriter

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Abusive Lonnie Byers, Canonical Character Death, Canonical Child Death, Character Study, Domestic Fluff, Domestic Violence, F/M, Falling In Love, Gen, Good Parent Jim "Chief" Hopper, Good Parent Joyce Byers, Heavy Angst, Implied/Referenced Alcohol Abuse/Alcoholism, Introspection, Kind of a songfic?, Lonnie Byers Being an Asshole, Mild Hurt/Comfort, Pre-Canon, Retrospective

Language: English

Characters: Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Sara Hopper, Will Byers

Relationships: Jonathan Byers & Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Will Byers & Jim "Chief" Hopper

Status: Completed

Published: 2021-03-21

Updated: 2021-03-21

Packaged: 2022-04-01 02:09:39

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,583

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Life burned Joyce Byers every chance it got. And though there was no perfect solution, she'd be lying if she said he didn't help her feel somewhere closer to okay.

Or, Joyce Byers recalls falling for Jim Hopper: Through the worst and through the best, over and over and over again.

A Life I Dared Only to Dream

Author's Note:

This fic was inspired by (and named after) All That Matters from Finding Neverland, which reminds me of Jopper in every way possible. If you're the kind of person that likes some music with their fanfics, please consider listening to it while reading.

Also, Lonnie sucks in this. A lot. Heed the Tags.

Looking back on it, Joyce wasn't sure when exactly she realized she loved Jim Hopper. There wasn't a specific moment, no big realization, just a slow descent into feelings she wasn't sure how to manage.

Maybe it was all the way back in high school, leaned up against that truck in the parking lot with a cigarette between her lips and a cocky smirk on her face mirrored in the man across from her. She didn't remember what they talked about, hell it didn't matter. All she remembered was the gentle music coming from the car radio, the soft cadence of Hop's laugh, and the warm August sun on her face, just enough to cement the feeling in the deepest parts of her memory.

It didn't register as developing feelings in the moment. She would have gawked at anyone who suggested such a thing. Her and Jim Hopper? It seemed crazy back then.

It was still crazy a few months (shit, it really was only a few months) later when she watched coverage of the war with her emotions boiling over. It felt like she was holding her breath every day she waited for a letter from him, and though they were rare, damn were they sweet. She loved those letters, and even knowing he was okay made the days easier. Not because she loved him, or anything, just because she was a concerned friend.

Yeah, a concerned friend.

It was still crazy all those years later, even after the world had

decided to chew them up and spit them out. Even after Hop got back from when Joyce felt like a prisoner in her own home. Lonnie had gotten worse than he'd ever been before, and even without a few drinks in him he was starting to become a terrifying presence, with a temper strong enough to bruise and words venomous enough to twist even the strongest of minds. Her wedding ring felt like a shackle, her hands just steady enough to hold her firstborn son in her arms.

She would visit his place late in the night, a young and wide eyed Jonathan crying in her arms to match the tears stubbornly leaking out of her own eyes. He'd answer like always, Diane never asking any questions (if she even saw), and she'd have a place to stay for the evening, no questions asked.

Hopper was so good with Jonathan, always calming him down, telling him that no one's gonna hurt him, not even his father. He'd be a great dad, Joyce would always think, but she'd never say seriously. Giving him a little bit of grief about it felt natural, but sincerity felt too much like pressure. Too much like love.

The invitation was always open to Joyce, and she took advantage on and off, the frequency ramping up after Will came along. It wasn't because she loved him, though. It was because she needed someone, anyone, and an old friend who cared more than damn near anyone else would do the job just fine in her eyes.

From there, it didn't take long for life to come at them again, gun drawn and trained at their heads and the hopes they managed to hold on to through it all.

Jim became a dad. And for a while, it brought him more joy than he could describe. He would gush about her intelligence, her wit, her smile, the way she made him feel like there was *something in this damned world to care about*. "I get it now, Joyce," he'd say on the phone, his voice rich and full of pride, "What you'd say about Jonathan, I get it now." She was proud of him, happy for him. He deserved to be a dad, to have someone to care about and for without abandon, to love recklessly.

What he didn't deserve was the late night runs to hospitals that Joyce only heard about years later. The medications, the doctors, the child

suffering in front of him.

What he didn't deserve were those four fucking words that Joyce couldn't even fathom hearing, "Your child has cancer."

The knot in her stomach was almost enough to knock her flat on her ass. She couldn't even imagine how he was feeling, but she'd be damned if she was going to let him go through this alone.

So, even when the fighting with Lonnie was boiling over. Even when the divorce was finally finalized. Even in those weeks where the little voice in her head told her something in the legal system might screw her over and cause her to lose her boys, she tried to call him once a week.

It wouldn't be long, but it would be helpful, just talking through feelings that were too extreme to be brought up with the kids, or for Hop, with Diane, It felt repetitive at times, but after she hung up the phone she felt the world get a little lighter, like she had just taken a drag of a cigarette against his car in the Hawkins High parking lot a million lifetimes ago. It wasn't a solution, it wasn't perfect, and it wasn't permanent.

But was it love? She wasn't sure then.

Now though, looking back on it, she thought it might have been.

It might have been love that kept her awake and steady when the cancer started to spread, and Hopper started to fall apart. It might have been love that forced her to check on him in person when she'd gotten the call that Sara, Sara who was the same age as Will, was dead. It might have been love that wouldn't let her relax until he got home safe after nights of drinking, and he had someone to watch out for him after Diane left.

And when life decided to throw its boomerang back around at them, and forced Joyce to brush with the same special hell that Hopper somehow walked out of alive, something told Joyce he might have thought about it too. Sure, he looked, and he talked, and he told her that no, she wasn't crazy because he was doing his job, but in the Upside Down when her mind was running too fast for her to

comprehend, she felt a soothing quality to his presence she'd never felt before.

But she would feel it again.

In his arms outside the lab when Will was... Well, it was hard for her to explain even now. She remembered thinking that it was nice, leaning into him without hesitation. The feeling of his head gently dipping into hers, shielding her from the world even just for a moment felt like the peace she so desperately needed. It felt calm, it felt real.

It felt a whole hell of a lot like love.

As the weeks passed, and the monsters died, and the new monsters rose to fill their spaces, it became harder and harder to ignore. In a weird, stubborn sense, it annoyed her. She didn't want to find it charming when he smirked like that, or feel the little swell in her heart when he casually used the phrase "our kids," but here she was, sitting in the front of an old convertible with Murray of all people, and by some strange miracle, not disagreeing with him. She was offended, yes, and horribly shocked but... He wasn't making something out of nothing.

But she couldn't. She wouldn't do that to Bob. She wouldn't do that to herself, damn another person, another good person to suffer because they were in her vicinity.

Thankfully, she didn't think about it for much longer. Hell, she didn't have time to.

How could she when she was invading a Russian bunker, watching Hop unload a magazine into a crowd of soldiers, and heading toward the gate to another dimension. She escaped death by only a narrow margin one too many times to care about her inhibitions.

Fuck it. Their odds of making it out unscathed weren't high, why not give it a chance. She invited him to Enzo's, Friday, seven o'clock.

It was a date.

And then it wasn't.

She thought about it for those months that he was gone, the look in his eyes shining without fear, but instead with regret, and grief and love. So much love. Love she tried to give to her, no, *their* still recovering kids, including and especially the girl he cared for more than nearly everything else on this earth. Recovery was long, and messy and painful, and full of realizations that Joyce didn't want to admit.

Not until she stood in the damp, dark Russian prison on that bitterly cold night, with his face in her hands and a smile on her face. He was frail, weak and desperate but his presence was still as calming to her as it was all that time ago, and his eyes still shown with tears, but this time, there was no mistaking it.

That was ease, that was relief, that was gratitude.

That was love, plain and simple.

And now, sitting with her head on his chest and his hand on her back, the kids long asleep and the weight slowly returning to Hopper's body, she was okay with that. She wasn't sure when exactly that started, or when the world pumped the brakes enough for her to realize it.

But it was love that she felt for Jim Hopper.

And that was more than okay with her.

Author's Note:

Sappy, I know, but I hope you enjoyed! If I made you tear up, I'm sorry, but also not really? Comments and kudos make my day, please let me know your thoughts!

Stay gold my friends.